



Native Americans in ENC Honor Heritage and Ancestors

By [JARED BRUMBAUGH \(/PEOPLE/JARED-BRUMBAUGH\)](#) • APR 15, 2013



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Native American descendants from New York state and eastern North Carolina honored their ancestors at a recent ceremony in Snow Hill. We talk about the Battle of Nooherooka fought between settlers and the Tuscarora people in the 1700's.



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8:23

Three weeks ago East Carolina University commemorated the Battle at Nooherooka, one of the most fierce battles of what is now called the Tuscarora War, and arguably the battle that marks when colonialists became the dominant power in North Carolina. The story of the Tuscarora Tribe after this battle is as varied as it is largely undiscovered. We spoke with the historians who helped organize the event, and some Native American descendants who attended. Stephen O'Connell has this.

The monument stands at the intersection of highway 58 and Nooherooka Road in Snow Hill. It honors hundreds of Tuscarora that lost their lives defending their homeland. Vince Schiffert, Teacher of language at the Tuscarora School in New York state, was part of the 150 Tuscarora who drove down to North Carolina.

"In our oral history we talk about we started up here with the other Iroquois folks up in the North east, and we left for some reason but we don't why, but it's called the Grape Vine Story. We went on this wandering journey and we ended up in North Carolina, Eastern North Carolina. We found this sign as omen Gardetnu, stands for it, pine in the water."

Some believe that the pine in the water refers to the Cypress Tree. Schiffert says ECU's archeological records indicate that the Tuscarora arrived in eastern North Carolina in 800 AD. Their first contact with the Europeans was in the 1500's, and many of them lived peacefully with colonialists, but by the early seventeenth century one of the two factions that are known to have existed at the time, fought against encroachment on their land, slavery, and the disease brought by the colonialists.

"The date traditionally given for the beginning of this Tuscarora War was September 22, 1711. An attack on New Bern and the surrounding areas by the Tuscarora but the tensions had been growing for over a year before that time."

The Southern Tuscarora's fought with the colonialists for two years, and on March 23 1713 Tuscarora's history took a violent and drastic turn. After two days of fighting (slow down) at the Tuscarora's Fort Nooherooka, in present day Greene County, colonialists and Indian tribes allied with them defeated the Southern Faction of Tuscarora led by Chief Hancock. After this, history tells the story of the surviving southern tribe and part so the northern group migrating north and joining their Iroquois allies. The Tuscarora left in eastern North Carolina dispersed throughout state and coalesced with different tribes and, and some of them comprise what is now called the Lumbee Tribe, which is the largest recognized Indian society east of the Mississippi. Millard Wayne Locklear Junior of the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina, who claims to be a descendent of the Southern Faction, says his family stayed in the state, but did not become part of the tribe now called Lumbee. He lives in Maxton, in Robeson County, North Carolina.

"After the war some of the Tuscarora's fled into the swamps, From my understanding, what my grandfather told me, it was four years later when the white man actually found a group of Indians living in the swamp, and that was us, that was some of my people. And the Tuscarora's up north knew about it, because they came down every year, once a year to try to get some these Tuscarora's down here in North Carolina to go back to the reservation so they could be protected but they told them they would never leave and they would die here on their homeland, they would never abandon their homeland, no matter what the cost. "

Locklear works at a steel plant and is going to school to be a tool and dye engineer. He went to East Carolina University's commemoration of the Battle of Nooherooka. He says he told the children from his tribe that they were going to see history made, and that they would meet some of their ancestors.

"I talked with some of the people up there that was sitting beside me at ECU and they didn't even know there was Tuscarora still existing down here in North Carolina. We had a good long conversation and then we had a social."

One of the men behind the commemoration at ECU was Professor Larry Tise who learned of the battle of Nooherooka a year ago, and has been trying to make the people of Eastern North Carolina know the significance of the Tuscarora tribe in this region. **Tise says that before the event, he had almost no contact with the Tuscarora of North Carolina.** He also seems to believe that the majority of Tuscarora descendants in the state are of mixed heritage. He described the social as the event that most signified the uniqueness of the 300 year celebration.

"And for that entire evening they were out dancing on the floor together, hugging and kissing, just like it was a long, long, 300 year overdue reunion, and I've had loads of letters from Tuscarora in North Carolina since that event saying that they felt like they finally were reunited with their brothers and their sisters."

Professor Tise said there were Indians from all over the country that attended the events. The other major event was the erection of a landmark a few miles north east of Snow Hill, on the land where the Battle of Nooherooka took place. The landmark is a single arch that represents a Tuscarora long house. Inscribed on both sides of the arch are images of Tuscarora Indians sent to the artist from the Tuscarora Nation of New York. The attendees walked through the arch, and on the other side was a newly planted tree.

"I'm not sure how man southern folks were there, but we did meet quite a few, and there was a lot good relationships started, so who knows where it could lead to."

The main difference between the Tuscarora of North Carolina and the tribe in New York, on paper at least, is that the Tuscarora Nation of New York is recognized on a federal level. Despite this marked difference in identity, the real struggle for the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina has been to distinguish themselves from the Lumbee Tribe. When asked about the cultural identity of the Lumbee both Schiffert and Locklear admit only vague notions of who they are, and Locklear seems to claim his father's beliefs that many of them were Tuscarora who gave into colonial pressure.


Chief Leon Locklear who also lives as part of the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina in Maxton, says he put forward a petition to the Division of Indian Affairs that seeks to gain state recognition. An official at the Division of Indian Affairs says the petition is under review, and would not be specific as to whether they would be granted a seat on the commission. As of now there are eight tribes that make up the commission at the division. They put forward initiatives for Indian health, housing, and education. However, when I asked Millard Locklear about the recognition, he told me it's not important.


"There's no piece of paper that can tell me who I am, I already know who I am, so I mean, if somebody wants to use that as a recognition that's on them. I mean it would be a good step for them but there's no government that can tell me who I am."

Amid a struggle for identity, and the story of a people that live with a largely broken history, the March event that honored the Tuscarora who died at the Battle of Nooherooka seemed to be an event that may turn out to go beyond the names Tuscarora, Lumbee, and Iroquois, names that were once thought to be so telling of a people's identity. Stephen O'Connell, Public Radio East.

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